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ABSTRACT

The efforts of the Louisiana State Department of Education Bureau of Evaluation to provide a valid and useful system for evaluation is presented in this overview. The focus is on the quality assurance and control functions of the Bureau in evaluating educational programs, conducting evaluation research on issues relevant to education in Louisiana, and in upgrading the quality and utility of program evaluation. A description is given of the inadequacies of the evaluation system prior to 1980 and the subsequent development of strategies to increase evaluator skills, increase user expectations, and to apply standards to the assessment of evaluation processes and products. The developmental process whereby a certification system was created for evaluators conducting evaluations of Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education programs, the levels of certification, certification requirements and the role of the Task Force in this process are also documented. Standards were formulated to assure appropriate, valid and reliable evaluations; the two-stage implementation procedure of providing evaluators with training in these standards and applying the standards to evaluations in the state is discussed. Also highlighted is the potential role of the Round Table of Educational Program Evaluators as a forum to bring evaluators and users together. (AEF)

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LINKAGES BETWEEN A STATE BUREAU OF EVALUATION AND THE PROFESSIONAL FIELD

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Linkages Between a State Bureau of Evaluation and the Professional Field

The Bureau of Evaluation was given the charge (1) to evaluate educational programs, projects and materials for the Department of Education, (2) to conduct evaluation research on issues of concern to educators in Louisiana, and (3) to upgrade the overall quality, and thus utility, of program evaluation in Louisiana. This symposium presents an over-view of the Bureau's efforts during this past year. Lee Hoffman and David Ransen discuss evaluations of two major Department projects, and Rebecca Posante's paper describes a research, or policy analysis, effort of the Bureau. My paper focuses on the quality assurance and control functions of the Bureau and is titled "Linkages between a State Bureau of Evaluation and the Professional Field."

To those of you in established evaluation units, there may seem some inconsistency between "quality control and assurance" which strikes a negative note and "linkages" which has a positive tone. However, it is necessary to consider the times in Louisiana when the Bureau opened. In Louisiana in 1980, hundreds of thousands of dollars were going into activities identified as evaluation. A survey of the 66 school systems revealed that for the most part, Title I directors conducted Title I evaluations. Two systems had evaluation units with trained staff. Five more systems had directors of evaluation (no staff) who coordinated evaluation efforts. Some school systems contracted with evaluation consultants for Title IV-C evaluations. Except among the two systems with evaluation units, consultants were used for special state or federally-funded projects.

In all there appeared to be 20-25 consultants providing evaluation services to the parishes in addition to the Title I Technical Assistance Center. These consultants were from diverse backgrounds, some having research and evaluation training and experience, some having none. Most were university-based from disciplines which ranged from administration to statistics. Also, evaluations were frequently contracted to retired superintendents.

In other words, in Louisiana in 1980, evaluations involved substantial amounts of money, included a variety of individuals with varying amounts of expertise, and were generally compliance activities with little effort placed on providing usable information. To quote one of the state educational policy makers, evaluations were "not worth a damn" for assisting in the decision making process. In fact, it seemed that evaluations, even the good ones, were ignored because of the general state of disregard in which the results were held.

It was into this arena that the Bureau entered in early 1980. And it was within this context and with these evaluators that we sought to upgrade the quality of evaluations. We, as a Bureau, can produce high quality, useful evaluations on three, four, or perhaps a half dozen programs a year. We can probably establish a climate of trust within the Department and with state-level policy makers. As a Bureau we can, through our own work, have an impact on education in Louisiana. However, we feel that our impact can be multiplied if the overall quality of evaluation in the state can be improved. Our strategy for upgrading evaluation includes (1) increasing the skills of those persons doing evaluations, (2) increasing the expectations of the users and potential users of evaluations, and (3) applying standards to measure the quality of the evaluation processes and products.

Our strategy is based on three tenets: (1) authority, (2) leadership, and (3) cooperation. Authority is one component because the posture of the State Department of Education in Louisiana over the last four years has been one of monitoring and assuring compliance with state and federal expectations. Leadership is a commitment because we feel (1) that we have the responsibility for conducting excellent evaluation and research ourselves and (2) that our work will serve as models for others to follow. It is not being too presumptuous to say that there has been a paucity of good evaluation and research in the state over the last decade, as illustrated by a recent search of the ERIC files for Louisiana studies. Further, only two projects in Louisiana have qualified as validated projects under the Joint Dissemination and

Review Board, and as far as we can ascertain, only two doctoral level graduates in the area of educational research have completed their work in a Louisiana University over the last ten to twelve years.

Cooperation is the final tenet because we have found evaluators in the state to be dedicated, concerned professionals trying to do adequate work under trying circumstances and because it is our nature to work with our colleagues to solve problems. In other words, we like our colleagues from across the state and we like working with them to improve not only the quality of their work but also our own. We have found that they know things we don't; that they have a wealth of experiences in working within the complex setting of Louisiana education. Also, they are willing to help us because they see the Bureau of Evaluation as a key to their own professional growth.

My paper focuses on the first and third of these tenets: authority and cooperation. The next three papers provide examples of the Bureau's leadership through the work that we are currently doing. I will discuss four seperate activities: (1) certification of program evaluators, (2) application of the Standards for Evaluations of Educational Programs, Projects and Materials, (3) the Round Table of Education Program Evaluators, and (4) the Task Force on Program Evaluation.

Certification of Program Evaluators

Beginning in July of this year the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will require certification of all persons conducting evaluations of Board-approved programs, projects, and materials. Basically, these are Title I, Title IV and special State Board projects.

There are two levels of certification. Level A certification applies to persons who can design, conduct and report evaluations of educational programs. Level B certification applies to persons who carry out the various procedures of a prescribed evaluation design. The Level B evaluator always works under the supervision of a Level A evaluator. The Level A certificate is permanent; the Level B is contingent on continuous service and is renewable.

Certification requirements are based on educational background, specific course requirements in evaluation and research, and experience, plus training in the interpretation and application of the Joint Committee's Standards for Evaluation of Educational Programs, Projects and Materials. A restricted grandfather clause is in effect from July through September 1981. To be certified under the grandfather clause, a person must be currently employed with evaluation as a major part of his or her job description and must be recommended by the state or a local superintendent. Additionally, under the grandfather clause, all qualified applicants must successfully complete training in the Standards.

We estimate that between 150 and 200 evaluators will be certified under the grandfather clause. Approximately three-fourths of these will be persons currently doing Title I evaluations who have had little or no training in evaluation or research. The other fourth--from 35 to 50 persons--will be presently under contract with local school systems to conduct Title I, Title IV-C or special project evaluations. A few will be well-trained, experienced evaluators. We expect from 15-20 persons to seek certification this year who do not qualify under the grandfather clause. Most of those receiving certification this year will be residents of Louisiana; a few will be consultants from outside the state.

As far as we can tell, we are the first state to require certification of program evaluators. We had no prototypes to follow; consequently, we view our process as developmental. We anticipate making modifications as they are needed.

Implementation of the Standards

Certification of evaluators assures that persons conducting evaluations in Louisiana meet minimum educational, experience and training requirements but it does not address the quality of the evaluation process. Certification does not provide assurance to program and policy decision makers that evaluations are conducted appropriately and that the results are valid and reliable.

Consequently, the State Board adopted for implementation in Louisiana the Standards for Evaluations of Educational Programs, Projects and Materials developed by the Joint Committee on Program Evaluation (1981). Needless to say, the application of the Standards is a much greater task than the certification process; and at this time it is considerably less defined. However, there are some decisions we have made that I would like to share.

The implementation of the Standards will be accomplished in two phases: (1) training for evaluators seeking certification status, and (2) application of the Standards to evaluations and processes in the state. The training phase is partially defined at this time. We will begin in June with a developmental workshop. The fifteen participants representing various elements of the evaluation community will work for a week with the staff of the Bureau of Evaluation and selected consultants including Dr. Daniel Stufflebeam of Western Michigan University. The purposes of this workshop are (1) to familiarize the participants with the Standards and (2) to define the goals and objectives for the subsequent training workshops. Using these goals and objectives, the Bureau staff will develop the format for subsequent training workshops.

These training workshops will be conducted in two stages: the grandfather phase and continuing certification. We anticipate conducting from eight to twelve workshops regionally across Louisiana during the grandfather phase and once or twice a year thereafter depending on demand. Persons qualifying under the grandfather clause will successfully complete the training by participating in all sessions and by completing all assignments; later successful completion of the training will include an exit exercise designed to measure knowledge and understanding of the Standards.

The application of the Standards will be more difficult to implement than the training. We are now identifying possible strategies ranging from careful monitoring by the Department staff to implementation through peer-group reviews. It looks as if we will use some combination of these strategies.

The Round Table of Education Program Evaluators

One early observation from the studies of evaluation in Louisiana was that there are some very skilled evaluators in the state who do not know one another. Seven local school systems have research and evaluation units; five of these are within a 50 mile radius of New Orleans. However, of these five research and evaluation units, only two of their directors had met at this time last year. After realizing that the evaluators were not talking to one another, one of the Bureau's first activities was to arrange a forum for administrators of evaluation units from the large city systems. This forum became the Round Table of Education Program Evaluators.

The Round Table meets for a day approximately once every two months to discuss issues of interest to the members. For instance, at the organizational meeting, it was the consensus of the group that one of their major common concerns was the Louisiana State Assessment Test and the upcoming proficiency test to be used in determining grade level promotion. The Round Table members identified concerns that they had, phrased the concerns as questions, and requested that by the next meeting that they have written responses. For the second meeting, written responses to the questions were presented as requested, and Dr. Peck, Assistant Superintendent for Research and Development, met with the group all day answering questions and listening to concerns about the state's testing programs.

Subsequent meetings have focused on the implications of proficiency testing for special education students and on Latent Trait Models with Dr. Ronald Hambleton. There is no set agenda for the next meeting; the Round Table members will take time to review previous descussions and decide on new areas of concern for the Round Table

This particular linking mechanism has been very successful and provides us with a model for similar forums with evaluator or user groups.

The Task Force on Program Evaluation

Dr. Peck mentioned our Task Force on Program Evaluation so I won't say a great deal more. What I would like to say is that the use of the task force established a precedent that we will continue to use. The Task Force, representative of evaluators in the state, provided valuable assistance in the development of the certification and standards procedures. There is no doubt in my mind that the procedures are much stronger and more consistent with the needs of the state because of the collective voices of the Task Force.

When the Task Force finishes its work, another representative group will be identified to serve as an on-going advisory council for program evaluation in Louisiana. The advisory council will provide the Bureau guidance on the state's evaluation needs and will provide us feedback on our activities.

Summary

To summarize very briefly, the activities described in this paper stemmed from a role of authority: a Task Force on Program Evaluation which had been appointed by the state Superintendent of Education before the Bureau of Evaluation was established. Through the linkages established by this Task Force and through discussion with our colleagues across the state we feel that we have seen a mandated activity turn into a cooperative effort. This has helped to legitimize the Bureau of Evaluation among Louisiana's educational evaluation community and has, we feel, contributed to the growth of the profession in our state.